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ABSTRACT

Previous research has suggested that men are stereotypically believed to be better leaders than women; that more physically attractive people are evaluated more positively than less attractive people; and that men and women use different leadership styles. This study examined the interactions of sex, leader style, and physical attractiveness on evaluations of leaders. College student subjects (N=154) rated leaders of an audiotaped college committee meeting on perceived attractiveness, likability, effectiveness as a leader, and other items related to their perceptions of the leader. Sex of leader, attractiveness of leader (from photographs), and leader style (autocratic versus participative) were crossed and rated by male and female subjects. Strong main effects showed that the manipulations were effective. The predicted interaction that women would be rated more negatively when autocratic and unattractive was not significant, but a four-way interaction with subject sex showed that the predicted bias held only for male subjects and that female subjects held similar bias towards male leaders. Attractive leaders were not rated as more effective overall, nor were participative leaders rated as more effective overall. (Author/ABL)

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ATTRACTIVENESS AND LEADER STYLE: EVALUATIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE LEADERS BY MALE AND FEMALE EVALUATORS

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ABSTRACT

Past research has suggested that men are stereotypically believed to be better leaders than women, more physically attractive people are evaluated more positively than less attractive people, and that men and women use different leader styles. This study was designed to look at the interactions of sex, leader style, and physical attractiveness on evaluations of leaders. One hundred and fifty-four male and female subjects rated leaders of an audiotaped college committee. Sex of leader, attractiveness of leader (from photos), and leader style (autocratic vs. participative) were crossed and rated by male and female subjects. Strong main effects showed that the manipulations were effective. The predicted interaction that women would be rated more negatively when autocratic and unattractive was not significant, but a four-way interaction with subject sex showed that the predicted bias holds only for male subjects and that female subjects hold a similar bias towards male leaders.

ATTRACTIVENESS AND LEADER STYLE: EVALUATIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE LEADERS BY MALE AND FEMALE EVALUATORS

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Past research has suggested that men are stereotypically believed to be better leaders than women (e.g., Brown, 1979; Massengill & DiMarco, 1979) and that men and women use different leadership styles - specifically, men use more autocratic leadership and women use a more participative style (e.g., Jago & Vroom, 1982; Statham, 1987). In addition, research on physical attractiveness suggests that physically attractive people are evaluated more positively than unattractive people (e.g., Dion, Berscheid, & Walster,1972; Landy & Sigall, 1974), and, some studies have shown an interaction between attractiveness and type of behavior on social perceptions (e.g., Sigall & Ostrove, 1975). This study was designed to investigate the interaction of sex, attractiveness, and leadership style on evaluations of leaders. We hypothesized that women leaders would be evaluated more positively (rated as more effective leaders and as more likeable) if they used a stereotypically feminine leader style and if they were attractive, and that evaluations of men would not be affected by physical attractiveness and style to the same extent.

In other words, women would be perceived negatively if they used an autocratic leader style and especially if they were unattractive, while men could "get by" with an autocratic style and unattractiveness and still be perceived to be a good leader and likeable.

Method

Subjects. Seventy-six male and seventy-eight female volunteers from psychology classes each evaluated one leader of a student "committee meeting." The 2x2x2x2 design provided for sex of leader, attractiveness of leader, and leadership style to be crossed and evaluated by male or female subjects.

Stimulus materials consisted of audio tapes of a student committee and photographs of the leader of the meeting. Twenty-five photos from a high school yearbook were rated by ten males and ten females for attractiveness. The photographs of the three most highly rated males, the three most highly rated females, the three lowest rated males and the three lowest rated females were chosen for the study. Two scripts were created in which a leader and five committee members planned a guest lecturer's visit. One script represented an autocratic leadeship style in which the leader was in control, made all the decisions and assigned tasks to group members. The second script represented a participative leadership style in which the leader was more

sensitive to the group's suggestions and requests, involving all the group members in the decision-making process and assigning tasks by asking for volunteers. Audio-tapes were made by a group of six students in which there was an autocratic male leader, an autocratic female leader, a participative male leader, and a participative female leader. The roles were each played by each group member, thus varying the voices within the stimuli (twelve tapes represented the four conditions, allowing for variation of voice-type).

Procedure. Subjects were brought into the laboratory and seated at a desk on which a photograph was taped. They were told that they would listen to a tape of a college committee planning a guest lecture for their club. They were told that the photograph on the table was of the leader of the committee, and that they would be evaluating the leader after the tape was completed. After they listened to the tape, they rated the leader on 21 various dimensions such as perceived attractiveness, likability, effectiveness as a leader, and other items related to their perceptions of the leader. These ratings were made on six-point Likert-type scales ranging from "not at all" to "very much."

Results

Three composite variables were created from the 21 ratings by means of a factor analysis. The three composite variables were labelled as controlling, likeable, and attractive. A series of four-way ANOVAs were calculated on these three composite variables and on individual items tapping specific dependent variables of interest that were not clearly represented by any of the composite variables. Some of the dependent variables tested the success of the manipulations while analyses of the composite variable "likeable" and of the item which asked "How effective was the leader?" (effective) tested our hypothesis regarding positive evaluations of leaders.

In general, the predominance of the significant main effects provided evidence that the manipulations of leader's sex, attractiveness, and leadership style were successful. A main effect for ratings of femininity and masculinity were found for leader sex, showing, as would be expected, that male and female leaders were quite easily differentiated by sex ($F(1,132)=81.22$, $p < .001$; and $F(1,132)=44.02$, $p < .001$, respectively). (The means for all main effects supporting the manipulations are presented in Table 1). Also, as was expected, leaders with attractive photos were rated as more attractive than were those with unattractive photos ($F(1,132)=92.88$, $p < .001$), showing that the

manipulation for attractiveness was successful.

A series of significant main effects were found which supported the success of the manipulation of leadership style. Subjects rated participative leaders as significantly more likeable, more feminine, more sensitive to the group, more involving of group members, and rated autocratic leaders as significantly more controlling and assertive.

There was no significant interaction supporting the hypothesis that ratings of female leaders would be affected by attractiveness and style more than ratings of males (likeable: $F(1,132)=0.43$, $p=.51$; effective: $F(1.132)=0.43$, $p=.51$). The means for these interactions for likeable and effective are shown in Table 2. Thus, subjects did not rate men and women significantly differently regardless of the style of leadership they used or their attractiveness. In fact, on all of the dependent variables, there were no significant interactions except for the four-way interaction of subject sex, leader sex, leader style, and leader attractiveness. This interaction was significant for "effective" ($F(1,132)= 11.21$, $p=.001$), showing that subjects rated their own sex relatively higher when they were attractive and autocratic or unattractive and participative, but rated the opposite sex relatively higher when they were unattractive and autocratic or attractive and participative (means are in Table 3). This interaction may very well account for the lack of significance for the predicted interaction. A similar 4-way

interaction for "likeable" was not significant at traditional levels ($F(1,132)=3.06$, $p=.08$), but a there was a trend in the same direction as the interaction for "effective."

There were no other significant interactions in the data.

Discussion

The significant main effects show that the manipulations in the study were successful, and that there was enough power in the data to detect significant differences. The four-way interaction suggests that male and female subjects evaluate their own sex differently from the way they evaluate the opposite sex, and that our hypothesis that attractive, participative women leaders would be evaluated more positively held only for male subjects. Both males and females tend to give their highest ratings to the unattractive, autocratic leader of the opposite sex, and to give their lowest ratings to the attractive, autocratic leader of the opposite sex. Perhaps we want someone of the opposite sex who is attractive to be warm and friendly, and when they lead autocratically, we find it especially negative. We can "forgive" an unattractive person for autocratic leadership.

The lack of support for our hypothesis that women who led participatively and were attractive would get higher evaluations than other combinations might be explained by the interaction with subject sex, or it might be explained that such prejudice toward women did not exist in this sample. There was no main effect for leader sex on any of our dependent variables except

for femininity and masculinity - therefore, men were not rated more positively overall, as has been found in previous studies. Also, attractive leaders were not rated as more effective, overall, nor were participative leaders rated as more effective overall.

We interpret the lack of evidence that women leaders are evaluated more stringently based on attractiveness and leader style as "good news." Since we got strong effects for our manipulations, we do not think this lack of support for our hypothesis is caused by either faulty manipulation nor lack of power. It would be somewhat encouraging if we might generalize these results to suggest that any prejudice toward women in leader roles based on their attractiveness and leader style is not so prevalent as suspected, but can be explained as a prejudice toward all leaders by their opposite sex evaluators!

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Table 1

MEANS FOR SIGNIFICANT MAIN EFFECTS SUPPORTING MANIPULATIONS

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Means	
Leader's Sex:	Feminine	Males: 2.05	Females: 3.75
	Masculine	4.24	2.76
Attractive:	Attractive	Unattr: 2.12	Attr: 4.21
Leader Style:	Likeable	Autocrt: 3.72	Part: 4.75
	Sensitive	3.28	4.58
	Involving	4.30	5.22
	Feminine	2.67	3.06
	Controlling	4.64	3.65
	Assertive	4.93	2.76

Table 2

MEANS FOR INTERACTION OF LEADER SEX, ATTRACTIVENESS, AND LEADER STYLE

Ratings of "effectiveness as leader"

	Males		Females	
	autocrat	partic	autocrat	partic
attract	4.72	4.95	4.61	4.89
unattract	5.19	5.05	4.94	4.89

Ratings on composite variable "likeable"

	Males		Females	
	autocrat	partic	autocrat	partic
attract	3.59	4.79	3.44	4.57
unattract	3.98	4.96	3.88	4.63

Table 3

MEANS FOR INTERACTION OF SUBJECT SEX, LEADER SEX, LEADER ATTRACTIVENESS, AND LEADER STYLE ON RATINGS OF EFFECTIVENESS

Male Subjects:

	Males		Females	
	autocrat	partic	autocrat	partic
attract	4.89	4.89	3.86	4.80
unattract	4.80	5.22	5.57	4.28

Female Subjects:

	Males		Females	
	autocrat	partic	autocrat	partic
attract	4.56	5.00	5.09	4.92
unattract	5.36	4.91	4.54	5.27